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ABSTRACT

This paper applies Lewis Coser's theory of social conflict to an historical examination of community junior college/university relationships. This relationship has been marked by antagonism, jealousies, and general substantial conflict since the 1920's--first, over the establishment of vocational programs in junior colleges, and second, over junior college efforts to obtain legislative endorsement and state support. Underlying the conflict were opposing views of the purpose of higher education: the development of intellectual power apart from society (rationalistic-academic) or the preparation of workers for society (utilitarian-democratic). The consequence of this conflict has been the mobilization and increased cohesion of the junior college advocates, the development of a junior college rhetoric, and finally the development of an identity for the community junior college based on the very characteristics of which university critics have been junior college and its graduates, universities remain skeptical of this younger institution's worth. For the community junior college, this skepticism may be a blessing in disguise. (BB)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE-UNIVERSITY RELATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE POSITIVE FUNCTIONS OF CONFLICT

Paper Presented at the Annual Convention of the
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COMMUNITY COLLEGE-UNIVERSITY RELATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE POSITIVE FUNCTIONS OF CONFLICT

Although many early social theorists and political philosophers recognized the possible constructive effects of conflict, the political climate during the past few decades has been such that analysts have concentrated their efforts on the examination of the dysfunctional aspects of conflict. This has been so much the case that we tend to think of conflict as necessarily evil. Its connotation is negative.

In 1956, Lewis Coser published The Functions of Conflict in which he pointed out that:

> "Commitment to the view that social conflict is necessarily destructive of the relationship within which it occurs leads ... to highly deficient interpretations."[1]

According to Coser, "Whether internal conflict promises to be a means of equilibrium of social relations or readjustment of rival claims, or whether to 'tear apart' depends to a large extent on the social structure within which it occurs."[2] Building on the earlier works of Georg Simmel, Coser distilled sixteen propositions which, when related to other theoretical and empirical studies, project a positive character for social conflict and provide points of departure for the analysis of social conflict relationships.

Several students of higher education have commented on the antagonistic relationship which has existed between universities and community junior colleges at various times in the development of the latter institutions. In the book entitled The Academic Revolution, Jencks and Riesman classify community junior colleges as "anti-university colleges." In their description of the roles that community junior colleges play in the higher education picture, they assert that the community junior college:

> " ... is not primarily an alternative model for other colleges or an alternative path to the top for individuals, but rather a safety valve releasing pressures that might otherwise disrupt the dominant system. It contains these pressures and allows the universities to go their own way without facing the full consequences of excluding the dull-witted or uninterested majority."[3]

As unappealing as this statement may be, and regardless of whether or not one agrees with their analysis, implicit in this statement is the idea that there is some value to the university in sustaining the community junior college despite the fact that it is, in their estimation, an anti-university institution. This implication in itself suggests the possible usefulness of Coser's propositions in making sense out of the historical relationship between the community junior college and the university. But even more, the authors' reference to the community junior college as a "safety valve" suggests that they themselves may draw from Coser for their analysis, for in his second proposition regarding social conflict, Coser propounds that:

"Social systems provide for specific institutions which serve to drain off hostile and aggressive sentiments. These safety-valve institutions help to maintain the system by preventing otherwise probable conflict or by reducing its disruptive effects."[4]

This paper is an exploration of the possible positive effects which conflict with universities has had for the community junior colleges. Information made available by various students of higher education is examined in relation to Coser's propositions. Restrictions of time require that only those propositions most useful to the analysis and necessary to the relatationship being studied be used.

The study is essentially an historical analysis. The structure of the analysis might prove disconcerting to those historians who are comfortable with the chronological ordering of events. For this, apologies are expressed; however, it is the nature of analysis that on occasion it brings discomfort.

Existence of Conflict

In his proposition #3, Coser defines conflict. He states that:

"Each social system contains sources of realistic conflict insofar as people raise conflicting claims to status, power and resources, and adhere to conflicting values. The allocation of status, power, and resources, though governed by norms and role allocation systems, will continue to be an object of contention to some degree. Realistic conflict arises when men clash in the pursuit of claims based on frustrations of demands and expectations of gains."[5]

Many higher educationists have recognized the existence of two opposing forces in the higher education value dispute. Brubacher refers to the two forces as the rational-humanistic approach and the naturalistic-utilitarian approach.[6] Taussig refers to the two forces as the academic value structure and the democratic value structure.[7] The nomenclature used is of little importance. What is important is the value structure to which the names refer. The rationalistic or academic position holds that the proper aim of higher education should be the development of intellectual power and not the preparation of workers for the society. Those taking this position believe that higher education institutions should stand apart; that they should be critical of society; and that they should raise the intellectual tone of the society. Theirs is a traditionalist concept of curriculum. As a consequence, they see institutions of higher education as comparatively fixed and universal.

The utilitarians or democrats, on the other hand, see higher education institutions as being intimately involved with the society, producing its workers and directing its course. Knowledge, they believe, should be useful to society and to the individual. Since individuals vary so widely in respect to ability and interest, the curriculum in higher education must be dynamic, since it is to be defined by the momentary needs of the citizenry.

At least as early as 1917, the utilitarianism of the late nineteenth century was being related to the junior college. In that year, Alexis F. Lange expressed the position that:

> "The junior college cannot make preparation for the university its excuse for being. ... the junior college will function adequately only if its first concern is with those who will go no further, if it meets local efficiency, if it enables thousands and tens of thousands to round out their general education, if it turns an increasing number into vocations for which training has not hitherto been afforded by our school system."[8]

By 1917, Lange had successfully ushered through the California Legislature legislation allowing junior colleges the right to provide vocational curricula. By 1921, this legislation had been expanded to provide the junior colleges with financial support. By 1925, the newly formed American Association of Junior Colleges saw fit to adjust its earlier definition of the junior college to accommodate the growing interest in vocational education.[9] This rapid, unprecedented action on the part of the California Legislature and new national thrust served as a stimulus to public junior college people across the country and as an alarm to their university colleagues who retained the academic value structure.

The reactions of the traditional higher education institutions across the country varied depending upon the current development of junior colleges in each state. In those states which did not already have junior-college enabling legislation, the higher education institutions of the state mobilized to block such legislation. In those states which already had such legislation, the "educational bloc" attempted to keep the junior colleges out of the state coffers. This, of course, brought open conflict in many states.

Essentially, three fears motivated the university opposition to the establishment of vocational programs in junior colleges. First, the vocational programs which were being added were not considered by the universities to be appropriate for college-level work. They felt that this work should remain anchored in the high schools. Secondly, the addition of vocational programs to the junior college offerings increased the expenses of these institutions to the point where they began to seek state support. And finally, with the addition of vocational programs, the junior colleges were seen to have a wider function than had other institutons of higher education; therefore, their introduction into communities which already were served by another higher education institution might be justified.[10]

It does appear, then, that the junior college-university relation- since the early 1920's can be characterized as a realistic conflict nship as defined by Coser in his third proposition. The insti- ions have adhered to conflicting values and they have been contenders or the resources of the states.

Character of the Conflict

According to Coser's Proposition #6:

> " ... a conflict is more passionate and more radical when it arises out of close relationships. The coexistence of union and opposition in such relations makes for the peculiar sharpness of the conflict."[11]

Those junior colleges which arose prior to 1920 grew under the watchful eye of the university. Brought into being as an academic extension of the local high school, they were not seen as competitors but as aides to the university, and therefore, they received not only the blessing but direction from these institutions. During this early period in the junior college movement, university presidents tended to work with local schoolmen in their state as the "prime movers" for these institutions. Men such as Tappan and Frieze in Michigan, Folwell in Minnesota, Harper in Illinois, and Wheeler and Jordan in California were among them.[12]

There is little wonder that the relationship between the two institutions were friendly during this initial period. The local school districts had, in effect, agreed to take some of the responsibility of the universities and asked for none of the universities' resources in return. In addition, the university, through the accrediting relationship with the junior colleges, was able to dictate the program offerings. In effect, the junior colleges derived their legitimacy, but no resources, from the university. It was not until the junior colleges sought legislative endorsement, thereby deriving their legitimacy from the state, that their relationships with the university began to deteriorate. At this point, the universities might have simply broken off their relationship with this prodigal child of theirs had it not been for the nature of the legislative endorsement that the junior colleges received. Because the enabling legislation for junior colleges specified their role in providing the first two years of university work, the universities were effectively required to deal with the junior colleges and, thereby, became unwilling captives of the state higher education establishment.[13] It appears that the necessary ingredients for a sharp conflict, according to Coser's sixth proposition, can be found in the historical relationship between the junior college and the university. Not only had the junior colleges broken away from the domination of the universities, but the universities were forced to cooperate with them at least to a limited extent.

Effects of Conflict

Coser's first proposition states that:

> "Conflict serves to establish and maintain the identity and boundary lines of societies and groups. Conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding social world."[14]

In 1918, Alexis F. Lange delivered an address about the junior college which he titled "What Manner of Child Shall This Be?" In 1931, Walter Crosby Eells wrote an article using the same title but pointing out that a more appropriate title might have been "What Manner of Youth Shall This Be?"[15] These and other leaders of the junior college movement continued to pose questions about the appropriate role and structure for the junior college until somewhere in the mid 1960's. Among the questions discussed and debated were whether this institution should provide vocational education; whether this should be a two-, three-, or four-year institution; whether it should be considered part of secondary or higher education; and whether it should be called a junior college or a community college. By the mid 1960's, the debate seemed to have subsided, and there seemed to be general agreement among the spokesmen for the junior colleges. In general, it was agreed that the community junior college should be a two-year college, with an open-door policy for community residents, offering a comprehensive curriculum and having a community orientation. It is not surprising for one aware of Coser's first proposition that the characteristics by which the community junior college established its identity are the very characteristics for which university critics have been most critical of the community junior college.

Perhaps the charge most frequently leveled at the community junior college by its university critics is that these colleges are non-selective and have no standards. They are, it is said, a haven for the "merely passable and the indigent bright"[16] or the "dull-witted or uninterested majority".[17] To such critics, the junior college spokesmen respond that it is within the democratic tradition that all be given an opportunity to succeed. An institution dedicated to the democratic principle, they contend, must always hold the doorway to opportunity open. The community junior college, therefore, has developed as part of its identity an "open-door" policy. In the rhetoric of the community junior college, "non-selective" is replaced with "democratic", and "no standards" is replaced with "accomodating individual needs".

A second charge commonly brought against the community junior college is that it tries to "be all things to all people."[18] The so-called "smorgasbord" or "potpourri" approach to curriculum is translated by the community junior college advocates into a "comprehensive curriculum" and is justified once again on the basis of its consistency with the democratic principle and the recognition of individual differences.

To the charge that the community junior college is "too provincial", the entrepreneurs of the community junior college movement have answered that the institutions are designed to meet local and regional needs. To the criticism that the community junior college faculty are not scholars, the response is that the faculty's function is to teach and not to spend their time advancing themselves through research and publication.

As the preceding statement implies, the community junior college advocates have not been passive responders to the criticisms leveled at them by their university adversaries. They have, on the contrary, engaged actively in drawing the boundary lines that separate them from

other elements in the higher education system. In The Academic Revolution, Jencks and Riesman assert that community junior colleges "have capitalized on the local backlash against national institutions and cosmopolitan values; on lower-middle class resentment against professional exclusiveness and social snobbery at the universities; and on adult anxiety about increasing emancipation of the young from adult supervision on residential campuses."[19] A quick review of the historical studies of the community junior college movement in the various states provides much evidence to support their assertion.[20] Community junior college advocates have been harshly critical of the universities.

The criticisms have been many and have emanated from both the university and the community junior college. For the community junior colleges, their criticisms of the university and their responses to their university critics resulted in the development of a community junior college rhetoric, indeed a battle cry, and finally, an identity. It is apparent that Coser's first proposition--that conflict with an external group contributes to the establishment of an identity--is not off the mark when related to the community junior college-university conflict relationship.

In his ninth proposition, Coser contends that:

> "Conflict with another group leads to the mobilization of the energies of group members and hence to increased cohesion of the group. Whether increased centralization accompanies this increase in cohesion depends upon both the character of the conflict and the type of group. Centralization will be more likely to occur in the event of warlike conflict and in differentiated structures requiring marked division of labor."[21]

The Federal Government had remained quiet on the matter of the junior college until the 1920's. However, World War I awakened an interest in the institutions, since the relationship between a strong nation and a technically educated nation was once more made evident. The junior college was, by this time, being associated with the development of vocational and technical education programs.

On June 30, 1920, Dr. George Zook of the U.S. Office of Education convened the first national conference of junior college administrators. This conference resulted in the organization of a permanent association, the American Association of Junior Colleges, which has since that time provided a national leadership and forum for the developing institutions. Within a few short years, the Association had developed a network of state affiliates that reached into the local institutions on a regular basis. The structure for a mobilized effort of schoolmen was in place.

But the concerns of a group of community junior college administrators were probably not enough to account for the rapid development of the community junior college in the United States. And, although the Federal Government continued to express its interest in the institution first through the moral support of two presidential commissions[22] and

finally through Federal funds, responsibility for the establishment and general funding of junior colleges remained with each state and in many states with the local communities.

The period of 1930 through 1970 was one of continuous reassessment in higher education. Various state commissions or other advisory groups were established to study the higher education provisions of each state in relation to its economic and manpower needs. Just as two presidential commissions tended to suggest the community junior colleges as viable candidates to develop the needed manpower of the nation, so did the various state commissions.[23]

As was noted earlier, attention to the vocational possibilities of the junior colleges tended to increase opposition to them from university leaders. This opposition was generally expressed in lobbying efforts against the junior colleges. At the same time that the vocational aspect of the junior colleges was increasing the opposition of university leaders, it was increasing the attractiveness of the institutions to the local communities. The attitudes of the university leaders and their legislative supporters angered the community junior college backers in the local communities. The junior colleges suddenly found spokesmen from among the populace. These new spokesmen, unlike the spokesmen who were directly associated with the junior colleges, felt free to vent their anger at the university leaders who stood in the way of the junior college development. In many states, the anger was vented in the daily press and raged for years. In the end, students of the community junior college movement were able to point to "grassroots" efforts in the communities as the "primary factors" in the development of the institutions since the 1930's.[24]

As the local supporters mobilized in each state, they tended to demand greater state support for the local institutions. As the states continued to increase their support for the institutions, the need for greater state control became more evident, and state-level agencies were developed to coordinate and, in some states, to administer the developing institutions. It is interesting to note that one of the functions of these state-level agencies has become the presentation of the junior college case to the legislature. In effect, there has been a centralization tendency within the community junior college movement, much as suggested in Coser's ninth proposition.

CONCLUSION

In his fifteenth proposition, Coser asserts that:

> "Conflict consists of a test of power between antagonistic parties. Accommodation between them is possible only if each is aware of the relative strength of both parties. However paradoxical as it may seem, such knowledge can most frequently be attained only through conflict, since other mechanisms for testing the respective strength of antagonists seem to be unavailable. Consequently, struggle may be an important way to avoid conditions of disequilibrium by modifying the basis for power relations."[25]

The relationship between the universities and the community junior colleges has been marked by antagonism, jealousies and general substantial conflict since the 1920's. Since that decade, community junior colleges have moved from relatively unknown and uncommon high school extension programs to institutions that are being singled out by national and state leaders as the segment of higher education most able to provide educational opportunities beyond high school. Forty-nine of the fifty states have established some form of junior college. The Federal Government, as well as the various state governments, has recognized them as legitimate institutions of higher education deserving of their financial support.

Although they have increased their accommodation to the junior college and its graduates, universities remain skeptical of this younger institution's worth. For the community junior college, this skepticism may be a blessing in disguise.

FOOTNOTES

1. Coser, Lewis A.: The Functions of Social Conflict, The Free Press, New York, 1956, p. 8.

2. Ibid., p. 152.

3. Jencks, Christopher and David Riesman: The Academic Revolution, p. 492, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1968.

4. Coser, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

5. Coser, op. cit., p. 54.

6. Brubacher, John S. and Willis Rudy: Higher Education In Transitions, pp. 283-289, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1958.

7. Taussig, Harold Edwin: "Anti-Intellectualism in the Public Schools: A Study of Cultural Values Underlying 20th Century Educational Procedures," (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1965) pp. 3-4.

8. Lange, Alexis F.: "The Junior College As an Integral Part of the Public School System," The School Review, 25, No. 7, pp. 471-472, 1917.

9. Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Association of Junior Colleges, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1925.

10. The story of conflict as junior colleges sought recognition and support has been presented by the students of the junior college movement in the various states. Many of these stories are documented in unpublished doctoral dissertations. E.g.:

    Crawford, Allen Price: "The Junior College Movement in Washington State from 1915 to 1955 With Proposal for Further Development," University of Denver, 1959;

    Doran, Kenneth T.: "New York, New Yorkers, and the Two Year College Movement: A History of Debate Over Structure In Higher Education," Syracuse University, 1961.

    Laird, Roy Albert: "The Development of the Junior College in Texas," University of Texas, 1956;

    McCollom, Stewart F.: "A History of Casper College With Reference to selected Historical Aspects of the Junior College Movement in the United States and Wyoming," University of Wyoming, 1964.

    Ross, William Robert: "The History of the Trinidad State Junior College to 1939," Colorado State College, 1940.

11. Coser, op. cit., p. 71.

12. This point is made in most of the textbooks dealing with the community junior colleges, but it is a point that can be documented by reviewing the studies that have been done in those states which had established junior colleges quite early. E.g.:

    Riekse, Robert James: "Analysis of Selected Significant Historical Factors in the History of the Pioneer Junior College in Michigan: Grand Rapids Junior College 1914-1962," Michigan State University, 1964.

    Fretwell, Jr., E. K.: "Establishing Local Public Junior Colleges: A Study of the Founding Problems Faced in Eight Selected Communities," Columbia University, 1953.

    Valade, William J. A.: "A Study of the Origin, Development and Trends of Selected Community Colleges of Michigan," Wayne State University, 1956.

13. By 1930, ten states had enacted laws giving legitimacy to the two years of college-level work in the local junior colleges of the state. See 1907, 1917 and 1921 California Statutes, 1917 Michigan statutes, 1917 Kansas statutes, 1925 Minnesota statutes, 1927 Arizona statutes, 1927 Missouri statutes, 1928 Iowa statutes and 1929 Texas statutes.

14. Coser, op. cit., p. 38.

15. Eells, Walter Crosby: "What Manner of Child Shall This Be?," The Junior College Journal, February, 1931, p. 309-328.

16. Lynes, R.: "How Good Are the Junior Colleges?," Harper's, November, 1966.

17. Jencks and Riesman, op. cit., p. 492.

18. Devall, W. B.: "Community Colleges: A Dissenting View," Educational Record, Spring, 1968.

19. Jencks and Riesman, op. cit., p. 382.

20. See those studies listed in footnote #9.

21. Coser, op. cit., p. 95.

22. President Harry S. Truman's Commission on Higher Education, 1946-1947, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Committee on Education Beyond the High School, 1955-1956.

23. See unpublished dissertation by Sharon MacLaren, "Dialectical Materialism As an Explanatory Mechanism for the Community Junior College Movement in the United States, 1950-1965, "Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1970.

24. See doctoral dissertations by E. K. Fretwell, Jr., "Establishing Local Public Junior Colleges: A Study of Funding Problems Faced in Eight Selected Communities, Columbia University, 1953; and William J. A. Valade, "A Study of the Origin, Development and trends of Selected Community Colleges of Michigan, "Wayne State University, 1956.

25. Coser, op. cit., p. 137.

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